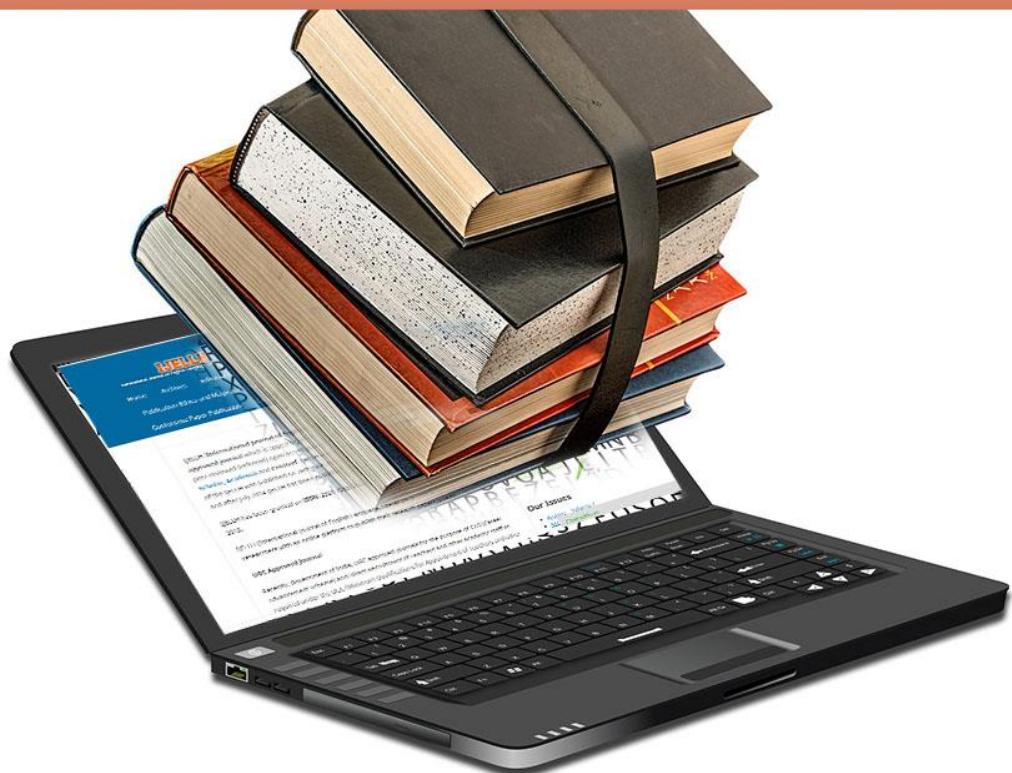


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ISSUES OF CORRUPTION IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S POST COLONIAL NOVEL NO LONGER AT EASE

Abstract

This research paper makes an attempt to showcase how Achebe tries to explore the root system of corruption through colonialism and the theme of alienation generated by colonial supremacy. The paper studies that how colonialist discourse creates a negative reflection of Africa, which the Postcolonial writers attempt to correct in their creative works. Achebe through his writing demonstrates how colonial rule and English education declines the native standards and tries to establish Christianity as the source of domination and judges themselves racially greater to the natives. The Colonizer persuaded the colonized natives to throw away the way of life and culture and impersonate the colonial's. Achebe has not shown an idyllic Africa, but takes a considerate view of African society with its own set of causalities. The problem of corruption, which is a common fact in post-colonial societies, is the key focus in the novel.

The fundamental idea of this paper is to outline how the seed of debasement is profoundly established by the pioneer clashes and resurgent changes in post-colonial life get changes the life of natives and how they familiarize to degenerate practices and started to distance from their own roots.

Keywords

Post-colonialism, Colonial supremacy, Alienation, themes

1. Introduction

Chinua Achebe is one of the well recognized authors in Nigeria and across the globe at large. In this book, Achebe shows us how corruption has formed the lives and behavior of the Nigerian societies from colonial era to present independence. “No Longer at Ease” is a post colonial novel that explores the issues of corruption and the ways it affected the lives of Africans. It even goes as far to talk about the traditional life, cultural behavior and the activities of the Nigerian society. “Corruption”, is the swindling behavior of virtuous people in the society and country at large.

Chinua Achebe even portrays Nigerians as proud and honorable people with a rich cultural heritage that has been devalued by the colonial power-mongers who forced their European ways on the people of Africa. In Achebe’s view, as the colonial governments gained control, the Nigerians lost connection to their culture. As their environment was transformed, their traditions became buried, and over time, the people adopted new traditions.

Chinua Achebe’s novel No Longer at Ease describes the twilight zone between the British rule of Nigeria and the country’s independence. No Longer at Ease was first published in 1960, the year of Nigeria’s independence from England. This is important because it is a novel that pertains to a trend of literature called post-colonial literature that still survives. There are many issues that arise out of post-colonialism, issues that authors and writers around the world have had to deal with. Africa, India, and the West Indies all have come out of the colonial era with a new literature that must address the problems that colonialism left behind. Some of the problems in post-colonial regions concern language, education, the

conflict between traditional ways and Western or European ways, the presence of the English, and corruption. Those who later moved into the land of the colonizer (for instance, Obi, while studying in England) experience an entire set of new problems such as nostalgia for home, memory, and the desire for the homeland.

“No Longer at Ease” traces the long-term impact of British colonialism in West Africa, dramatizes social and economic dilemmas still facing modern Africa and has helped lay a vital part of the stylistic as well as thematic groundwork for important works of African Literature that have followed. The book opens with the trial of Michael Obiajulu Okonkwo, referred to as Obi throughout the novel, who is accused of having accepted a twenty pound bribe. Then it jumps back in time to provide an account of how Obi ended up in that position. Thus, we find out that he had been the recipient of a scholarship to study in England and that, following his return he took a job as a civil servant. Obi had a radical position against corruption and he firmly believed in the young generation. A detail to be noticed is that the protagonist is the son of Nwoye, now Isaac Okonkwo, therefore the grandson of the central character in “Things Fall Apart”. A series of unfortunate events, among which a failed romantic relationship, the death of his mother and a poor management of resources, all transform Obi and lead to his accepting bribes in a reluctant acknowledgement that it was the way of the world he lived in. Chinua Achebe was one of the first writers who attempted to revive "African culture". He was the first person who created a new African literary tradition in his novel and this is the fundamental characteristic that makes his novels outstanding. He believes that the best way to eradicate colonialism is through education.

2. Representation of Achebe's Post Colonial novel No Longer at Ease

In No Longer at Ease, Achebe reveals that his protagonist Obi Okonkwo is not a competitor in a power struggle, but rather is a victim of the struggle caused by colonialism. Ezeulu's power struggle highlights the dangers of asserting authority where it has not been completely merited, and his selfishness to impose his will upon his people ultimately leads to their demise. While the power struggle creates an unstable environment that leaves Ezeulu and the Igbo people more susceptible to external influences, Obi succumbs to the pressure of colonialism ultimately leading to his demise, but essentially, Achebe uses the power struggle to illustrate different perspectives of the negative impact brought to the people of Igbo.

Summarily, what Achebe is attempting to portray through the use of a power struggle is the driving force of alienation that colonialism brought to Igbo land. Both Obi and Ezeulu find themselves torn between two cultures unable to fully be the part of one or the other. While Ezeulu attempts to lead his people into using western colonization for the good, his lust for power blinds him and leads him to tragic end. Obi, on the other end, has brought back to his homeland western education. He is quickly alienated from his people through his attempts to live correctly, according to western ideals and adhere to the traditions of his people. His willingness to be open to the positive aspects of colonialism makes him an outsider to his homeland. Essentially, the feeling of being alienated leads Obi to accept the bribe that is his demise. Making it easier, so to speak, to succumb to colonialism. Through the struggle power, Achebe successfully demonstrates how colonialism has had a negative impact on the traditional villages in Nigeria without totally blaming westernization. Instead, by ending the novel tragically, Achebe is also identifying that the Igbo people are also partly to blame by not using the education they were given in a positive regard to the prevention of the people.

3. Colonial supremacy in Achebe's No Longer at Ease

Colonialism is an unending subject that is not only happening in Africa but in third world countries across the world. We see in "No Longer at Ease" a simple example of how Colonialism has shaped this culture in a way that is not traditional for the people of Nigeria. Colonialism as a whole is a negative effect in No Longer at Ease. Colonialism disrupts the peace of the Nigerian people and causes corruption. Without the presence of Europeans the people of Obi Okonkwo's village would be able to follow their religious and traditional values instead of having new idea implemented on them. Different examples proven through Obi and Clara display how the European and the Nigerian cultures clash. No Longer at Ease does a good job of touching on each of these topics and although the story may not focus on these topics its displays enough context in where you can conclude that this is a problem of some kind. I think this is the hidden message with in "No longer at ease" and would love to spotlight and develop the thought of Colonialism.

Colonialism is taking away from a country's complete identity and forcing the country coming in idea of a successful society onto another set of people that might have their own way of doing things already.

Focusing on the events of "No Longer at Ease" and other historical events that involve colonialism that have caused positive and negative effects on third world countries and cities will be the basis of my research paper.

4. No Longer at Ease: Subject of Isolation

In No Longer at Ease, Obi Okonkwo's alienation arises as a result of dual cultural experiences. His sojourn in England helped in alienating him from the culture of his people.

As walter Rodney noted “colonial education did more than corrupt the thinking and sensibilities of the African, it filled him/her with abnormal complexes which de-Africanized and alienated him/her from the needs of him/her environment”.

Obi left Nigeria for college in England at the typical age. Isolated and alone in a foreign country, he fell in love with his native land. He longed for it in that nostalgic, homesick way that caused him to paint an idealistic picture in his head, which bore little resemblance to reality. When he returns to Nigeria, he's not quite prepared for the reality he faces. He is forced to confront corruption that exists in every segment of society, while combating certain social customs that are socially restrictive, like restrictions on marriage. These cultural values are still entrenched in Nigerian society despite the introduction of Western values and Christianity. As a result, Obi finds himself increasingly isolated and alienated from his friends and family and, ultimately, from his lover Clara. Although Obi's western education alienated him from his friends and family and gave him a new set of values, it could not prevent him from falling back into the corrupt system at home. Obi displays classic symptoms of what has been called the "postcolonial identity," it would be insufficient to blame his downfall simply on his alienation from his mother culture and tongue.

Obi represents the younger generation of African societies that have turned to corrupt practices to support a lifestyle ushered in by westernization. The onslaught of western influence causes the displacement of the traditional societies, degeneration of age-old values and unending traumas. Obi no longer belongs to the old society. He receives a similar education and is selected by Igbo community to study in England. After getting western education he considers himself an independent youth, with a Western concept of government and administration. He remains in an undone state who neither accepts his parents' values nor rejects them. He rejects the old orthodoxies, but while accepting the modern he falls prey to corruption and accepts bribes, one of the undreamt practices of African culture. Ultimately he

feels isolated. Khayyam remarks the typical feature of postcolonial African novel representing the issue of isolation: The isolation of the individual in African novel makes him typical and representative of his society.... It is the will of the majority that consciously contributes towards a coherent and organic African society. But the problem for a sensitive, self-conscious creative being is how to decline himself from his group and to assert his individuality. The novelist depicts a psychological snap-shot balancing dream and nightmare, enthusiasm and alienation, urges and frustration to evoke a theme of the “ethical predicament” of a post-colonial youth.

5. Major themes represented in Achebe's No Longer at Ease

One of Chinua Achebe's main socio-political criticisms in No Longer at Ease is that of corruption in Nigeria. From the moment the book begins the main character, Obi Okonkwo, is confronted with the issue of bribery. From the moment he arrives at customs to the point at where he gives in to taking bribes himself, the voice of Achebe lingers in the backdrop through the words.

At first Obi is as critical as Achebe of bribery. He refuses to take bribes and also finds it necessary for himself to be a "pioneer" in Nigeria, bringing down corruption in government and instigating change. It seems that corruption runs rampant and that everyone in Nigeria from the "white man" to the Umuofian Progressive Union participates in "seeing" people about what they need done. Men offer money, and women offer their bodies, in return for favors and services. Obi believes that by not taking bribes he can make a difference. He had written, while at the university in London, a paper in which he theorized on what would

change the corruption of high positions in Nigeria. He believed that the "old Africans" at the top of civil service positions would have to be replaced by a younger generation of idealistic and educated university graduates, such as himself.

Achebe, however, is not as optimistic as Obi because he has Obi fail. Achebe takes us through the path of how someone like Obi can come to take bribes. The book begins on a negative note: starting with Obi's trial. It is as if Achebe, by beginning in the end, is saying that Obi was doomed from the start. Obi's position is a difficult one. He is born in Ibo, but he has been educated in England and often feels himself a stranger in his own country. He has lost his love because of a rule of the past, he has suffered under great financial distress, he has exerted himself because of the expectations others have placed on him, and he has lost his mother. All of this brings the protagonist of the novel to fall into what he once had believed was a terrible and corrupt act. Still, Obi always feels guilt at taking a bribe, and he had decided to stop taking them. By having Obi get caught, even amid an aura of repentance and guilt, Achebe further illustrates the hypocrisy of all who have participated in bribes and now throw stones at Obi. And, at the same time, it tells us that, although he got caught, Obi is still a pioneer because he has sworn to not do it again. It may be that his beginning as a "pioneer" is a rough one, one that has taken a curved path, but it does not definitely mean that he cannot still lead toward change. Still, perhaps Achebe may be saying that this is not true, and that Obi, ultimately, has failed at the task he set before himself.

Whether the book is a tragedy (an unresolved situation) in Obi's definition of the word or not is up to whether we believe that it is Achebe who is the greatest "pioneer" in the novel. In other words, it is the author's critical voice that will lead others out of such corruption, if not by only making the world and younger generations of Nigerians aware of it.

Though set several decades after "Things Fall Apart", "No Longer at Ease" continues many of the themes from Achebe's first novel. Here, the clash between European culture and traditional culture has become entrenched during the long period of colonial rule. Obi struggles to balance the demands of his family and village for monetary support while simultaneously keeping up with the materialism of Western culture.

Conclusion

Thus, Achebe represents the post-colonial circumstances in Nigeria in a sensitive manner in the novel No Longer at Ease. Chinua Achebe in his novel No Longer at Ease, provides us an exclusive picture of life in Africa before the arrival of Christianity and colonization and afterwards. He shows how African people lost their traditional culture and values, replacing them with foreign beliefs. Living in a colony and studying European literature made Achebe aware of the tools used in colonizing the people of Africa. He has always made an attempt to define the colonizers by the ruling power and is divested of his own rights in his own land, No Longer at Ease pictures how European education system inspires Africans to study through this system and inculcates their values among the Africans. This paper tries to clarify how education is manipulated in the hands of colonizers and how the colonized who has been educated through this system gradually loses his identity. Chinua Achebe, the great African postcolonial writer, has had a significant role in the fight against colonization and helping the African people to regain their original African identity. In this novel, he has tried to depict the relationship between European education system and the corruption of the African people through this system.

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